ARMOR AT WAR SERIES

7061

PANZER VOR! 4

German Armor at War 1939-45

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CONCORD
PUBLICATIONS COMPANY

Crowds of curious locals gather to observe at close hand a group of Pz.Kpfw.IIs (Ausf.A, B or C) as they halt in the center of a small village, probably in the pre-war era. The Panzer at the far left shows the location of the pivoting rod antenna and its storage trough on the port side of the superstructure. The Pz.Kpfw.II was unique in this regard, as the Pz.Kpfw.I, III and IV had their pivoting rod antennae and stowage troughs on their starboard sides.

A Pz.Kpfw.II Ausf.A, B or C approaches a Soviet village in the company of infantry, probably during the early spring of 1942. It has the retro-fitted round commander's cupola with periscopes that was authorized to be fitted after experience reports from the fighting in Poland were analyzed. This Panzer is loaded with stowage that experienced crewmen found to be indispensable for comfort and survival on the Ostfront. This includes jerry cans containing fuel and/or water, stowage lockers of various sizes and spare track. Note also the convoy station-keeping tail-lamp mounted to the hull rear plate, just below the exit pipe from the exhaust muffler.

A Pz.Kpfw.II Ausf.F follows a group of Pz.Kpfw.IVs, while accompanying three Horch Kfz.15 and Kfz.17 medium field cars from a Nachrichten (signals) unit, all from Panzergenadier-Division Großdeutschland. From this angle, the Pz.Kpfw.II Ausf.F is identified as such by the shorter, latter exhaust muffler on the rear plate, as well as the fighting compartment front plate, which ran straight across the full width of the superstructure. From its inception, the Ausf.F was also built with the circular commander's cupola, which incorporated periscopes around its rim; this was a retro-fitted feature on earlier Pz.Kpfw.IIs. Note that the Panzer all carry the unique turret Tac markings associated with this division, in this case a "+/". In the case of the Pz.Kpfw.IV, it carries what appears to be a "+6" on the Gepäckkasten (turret bustle stowage bin), as well as the Großdeutschland divisional insignia on the port side mud flap.

This Pz.Kpfw.III Ausf.H has been fitted with bolted-on Zusatzpanzerung (appliqué armor) over the bow as well as another plate fitted on the superstructure front; note the holes for the driver's twin periscopes as well as the cut-out around his view-port flap and the radio operator's MG34 ball mount. Note the later commander's cupola style and the small cloth dust cover fitted between the 5cm KwK gun tube and its armored sleeve. Typical for vehicles that operated in North Africa (note the burning British lorry in the background), this Panzer is covered in spare track and carries extra fuel and/or water in jerry cans, as well as at least one spare road-wheel.

A Pz.Kpfw.III Ausf.H maneuvers along a rocky coastal beach while waves break in the surf behind it. Much like the preceding photograph depicting another *Ausf.H*, this one also has bolted-on Zusatzpanzerung (appliqué armor) over the bow and glacis plates, as well as another plate fitted on the superstructure front. Note that instead of two discreet holes for the driver's twin periscopes (as seen elsewhere in this book) there is only one larger cut-out for them.

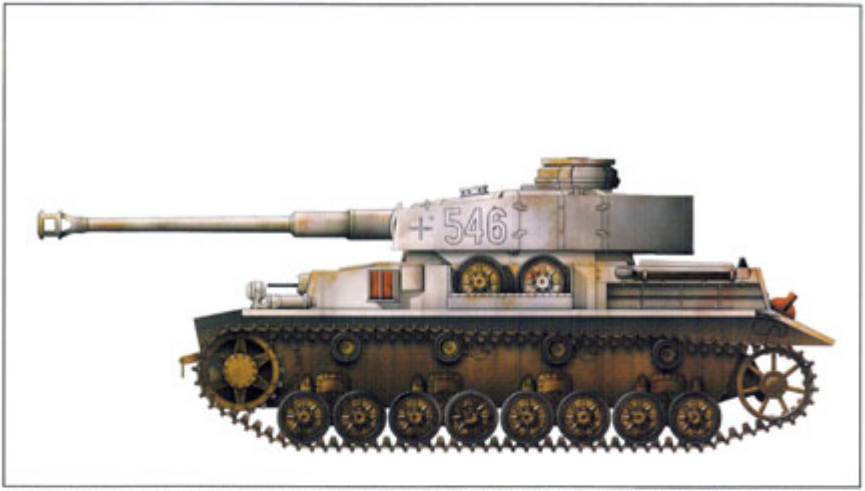
The Pz.Kpfw.III Ausf.J contained a major armor upgrade since the front hull and superstructure plates were based on a single plate 50mm-thick. The new superstructure plate necessitated the design of a new Kugelblende 50 (machine gun ball mount for 50mm armor plate) and the adaptation of the Fahrersehklappe 50 (driver's vision port for 50mm armor plate) first fitted to the StuG.III Ausf.A. The fabricated/welded tow points on the bow plate were replaced by extending the hull side plates slightly and drilling a hole to accept tow hooks. Other features previously introduced were retained such as the short 5cm KwK, commander's cupola and 40cm tracks with the corresponding drive sprocket. This overall Dunkelgrau RAL 7021 Panzer is from a Panzer-Regiment's I. Abteilung command element as denoted by the white-outlined Tac number (01) on the turret side.

The only thing that can be said with any certainty is that this Pz.Kpfw.IV is an Ausf.B, C or D. It has the commander's cupola introduced on the Ausf.B as well as the cut-out on the turret rear face that was deleted after the Ausf.D. It wears a thin, white outline Balkenkreuz national insignia on the superstructure rear plate, which along with the terrain, suggests that this Panzer was knocked-out during the French Campaign of 1940.

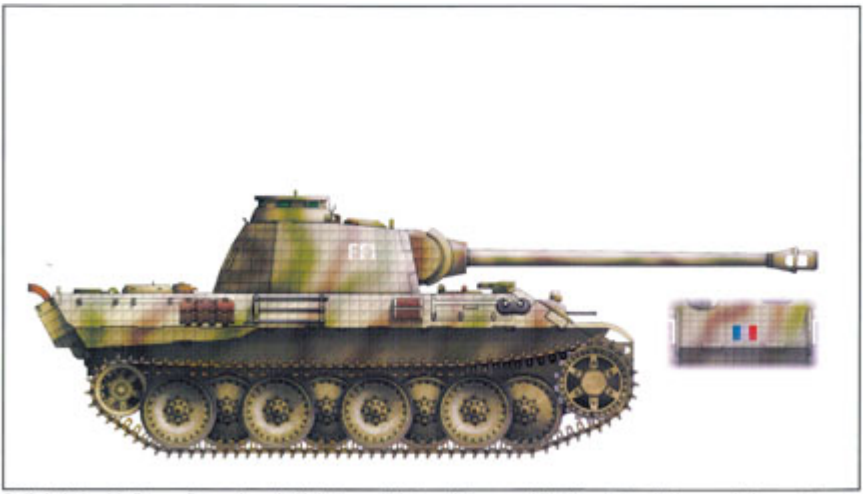
Although difficult to determine with any certainty, this Pz.Kpfw.IV appears to be an Ausf.D. It has the stepped front superstructure plate without 'Vorpanzer (spaced armor), which was typical of the Ausf.D. It carries a commemorative plate, in black, painted on the radio operator's side view-port cover; this was often applied to remember a fallen crewman and usually carried his name and date of demise. Note also the unusual fitting of the vehicle jack normally seen on the Pz.Kpfw.I-series, on the fender in the foreground. In the background, an 8.8cm FlaK has just fired a round down-range; the gun tube was caught in full recoil by the photographer.

This excellent photo provides a detailed portrait of a Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.E. This particular Panzer has Vorpanzer (spaced armor) on the stepped superstructure front plate and Zusatzpanzerung (applique armor) on the hull and superstructure side plates. Other items introduced on the Ausf.E are also easily seen. These include: new hub-caps on the road-wheels, new drive sprocket, and re-designed flush-fitting lids for the final drive access hatches. Although not visible here, the turret side and rear walls were re-designed to eliminate the separate bulge below the commander's cupola, which itself was re-designed. The new external lock for the turret side access hatch lids can also be seen just above the white-outline Balkenkreuz national insignia.

During the research phase of this series, Concord managed to come upon a photo album that belonged to a veteran of Panzer-Regiment 25, from the 7. Panzer-Division. So, there is a remarkably extensive set of photographs of a single Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.H. (Tac number 546) that includes the crewmen at their stations and as a group gathered around their Panzer. This first group of photos shows: four of the crew men standing next to their Panzer, one crew man holding a KwK40 round, another (Gefr. Hansel) at the radio operator's station and finally, Gefr. Heilmann peering out of the turret side hatch opening from the gunner's position. Several features identify this Pz.Kpfw.IV as an Ausf.H. They include: single-piece hatch lid on the commander's cupola, new pattern hub-caps for the road-wheels (although some of the earlier types are still seen) and the elimination of the pivoting mount on the starboard side superstructure plate for the 2-meter rod antenna; the antenna has been moved to the rear corner of the superstructure plate on the port side.



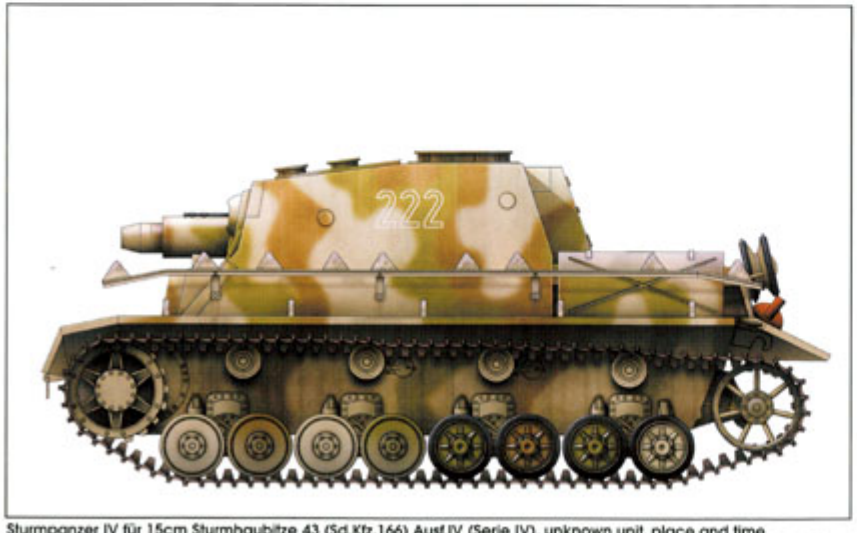
Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.H early version, II. Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 25, 7. Panzer-Division, Ostfront, winter 1944-45
This Panzer from the 5. Kompanie. Tac number 546, is covered in a very worn whitewash, which is only broken up by the black-outline Tac numbers. There are the remnants of a Balkenkreuzes black center on the turret Schürzen, just in front of the numerals. The base color is Dunkelgelb RAL 7028, but any use of the supplementary colors is obscured by the whitewash.



Pz.Kpfw.V Ausf.A, Forces Françaises de l'Interieure (FFI, French Forces of the Interior), unit, time and place unknown
This later Panther Ausf.A has Zimmerit which was over-painted in Dunkelgelb RAL 7028, with a possible faint mottle of the secondary colors (Olivgrün RAL 6003 and Rotbraun RAL 8017). The letters "FFI" in white are painted on the sides of the turret, a bit forward and above the center. A French "Tricolor" national insignia (flag) is painted low in the center of the upper glacis plate in the usual colors of red, white and a medium-dark blue.

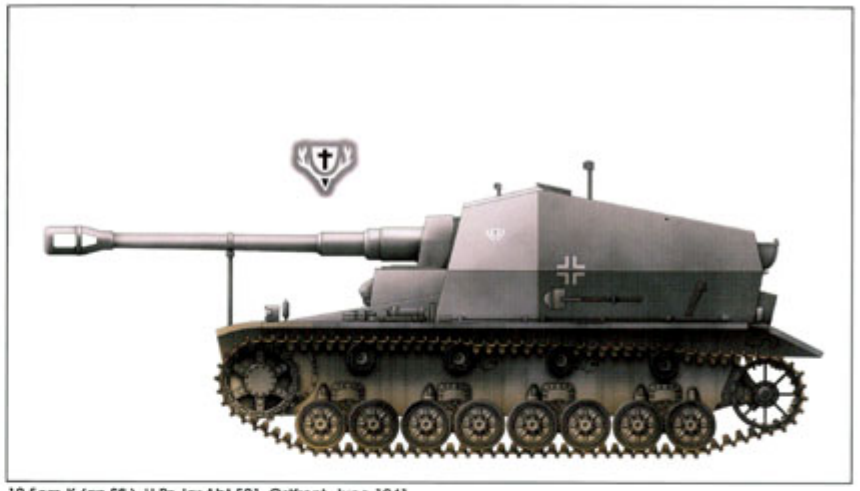
StuG.III Ausf.G, unknown unit, place and time

This assault gun was covered in Zimmerit in the so-called "waffle plate" pattern, with Dunkelgelb RAL 7028 as the base color. The crew has applied a rather distinct brushed-on pattern using the issued secondary colors, Olivgrün RAL 6003 and Rotbraun RAL 8017. It is similar in nature to the "Flocage" pattern seen on a French Char B1 in 1940. The Balkenkreuz national insignia is seen in black towards the rear of the second hull Schürzen plate, at the top.



Sturmpanzer IV für 15cm Sturmhaubitze 43 (Sd.Kfz.166) Ausf.IV (Serie IV), unknown unit, place and time

This assault howitzer is painted in a base color of Dunkelgelb RAL 7028 with faint blotches of the secondary colors, Olivgrün RAL 6003 and Rotbraun RAL 8017. The Tac number, 222, is in white outline form and is centered on the upper portion of the superstructure side plates.



10.5cm K (gp.Sfl.), H.Pz.Jgr.Abt.521, Ostfront, June 1941

This rare tank destroyer is one of only two built and is finished in an overall coat of Dunkelgrau RAL 7021. It is marked with the unit's insignia, a stag's head below a shield, in white, on the front-side superstructure plates. A white-outline Balkenkreuz national insignia is painted at the forward part of the main superstructure plate, with the center over the joint between the upper and lower plates.

T-11 light tank, Bulgarian 1st Armored Brigade, 1st Armored Regiment, 1943

This Panzer, sold to the Bulgarians by Germany, was commandeered from a batch of ten LT vz.35s originally to be exported to Afghanistan, featuring the A7 version of the 37mm gun. The vehicle was finished in overall olive green with a two-digit Tac number, 56, on the turret sides in white. A rectangular plate was painted in white on the hull rear plate, off-set to the left, with a registration number consisting of a Roman "B" (which was actually the Cyrillic "V", denoting "Voiska", or Army) followed by a five-digit number, which ran from B60023 to B60058.

Posing for posterity, what is probably a US airman (note the cap and "aviator" sun-glasses) stands before a knocked-out Panther Ausf.G. The Panther clearly exhibits some of its main identifying features, such as: the continuous slope of the superstructure side armor plate, the new style of Schürzen mounting rail and the re-location of the Bosch black-out driving head-lamp from the glacis to the port-side fender. Note that the outer road-wheel towards the rear of this Panther (slightly to the right of the man's left leg) appears to be the earlier type with only 16 bolts around the rim; fire has consumed the rubber tires in many cases.

These two photographs depict a very late-production Panther Ausf.G, with nearly all of the features of the type visible. In the first photo, a group of GIs pose for the photographer, while others inspect their late enemy. Note that the driver's and radio operator's hatch lids have gone missing; this was common since they both had a quick-release feature that would cause the lids to open and fall away from the Panzer during an emergency evacuation. The contours of the so-called "chin mantle" for the 7.5cm KwK42 L/70 main gun are visible as well as the sheet-metal rain guard above it; the Heckzurrung (external travel lock for tank gun) is also visible next to the boot of the closest GI. This view also affords an excellent look at the factory-applied camouflage pattern on the glacis plate. The side view shows more of the camouflage pattern (probably a base of Olivgrün RAL 6003 with hard-edged bands of Dunkelgelb RAL 7028 and Rotbraun RAL 8017) as well as the tower for the Kampfraumheizung (crew compartment heater) on the port side of the engine deck. Grouped at the rear corner of the turret are three items of interest: the tiny Pilze socket for the 2-ton Kran, the Nahverteidigungswaffe (close defense weapon) and the mount for the Lost-Erkennungstafeln (poison gas identification panel). This Panther is the subject of a color plate in this book.

This late-production Tiger I raises a tactically un-sound cloud of dust as it follows behind another schweren Panzer. Beginning in February of 1944, new Tiger Is were fitted with Gummigefederten Stahllaufrollen (rubber-cushioned steel-tired road-wheels). The new road-wheels were designed to conserve raw materials (rubber), and had a secondary effect: when changing from battle tracks to the narrower transport tracks, the outer road-wheels no longer had to be removed; this eased the process somewhat. The new road-wheels, combined with revised tool stowage, a splash ring around the base of the turret and the cast Prismenspiegelkuppel (commander's cupola with periscopes) on the turret roof, were the main identifying features of this variant.

This late-production Tiger I from H.s.Pz.Abt.507 shows the new Gummigefederten Stahllaufrollen (rubber-cushioned steel-tired road-wheels) to advantage. Other details of note are the new way in which the extended hull side plates have been contoured; this allowed more freedom of movement for the large "U"-bolts during recovery operations. The Bosch head-lamp is also fitted in the new position on the superstructure front plate. The insignia of this unit can be seen next to the Fahrersehklappe (driver's vision port); this schwere Panzer is the subject of a color plate in this book.

This Pz.Kpfw.38(t) is a later model (Ausf.E, F or G) as can be seen by the straight superstructure front plate and the high-mounted exhaust muffler on the rear plate. It is supporting a group of German infantrymen as they seek cover between a railroad embankment and a fence. Their clothing, the 2-piece, padded, reversible winter parka and trousers were not common issue until at least the second winter on the Ostfront (1942-43), which indicates that this Pz.Kpfw.38(t) is a "survivor" and is possibly assigned to unit entrusted with rear-area security. Its proximity to a railroad track also suggests that it may be assigned to an armored train as an off-loadable pursuit asset.

Here, a dusty and muddy Pz.Kpfw.38(t) stands by at a fuel depot somewhere on the Ostfront. When Germany "annexed" Czechoslovakia, Hitler's shrewd gamble paid off quite handsomely in a number of ways. He did not have to do battle with the well-equipped Czech army; he inherited and harnessed the Czech's military/industrial capacity, with the almost immediate ability to create new Panzer divisions; and, he opened up another avenue of approach for the eventual invasion of Poland in 1939. Note the yellow tactical number ("124") and the black/white Balkenkreuz national insignia. In the initial stages of Operation Barbarossa, the 7., 8., 12., 19. and 20. Panzerdivision fielded a total of 625 of these capable leichten Panzer.

A line of later Pz.Kpfw.38(t)s, Ausf.E, F or G, takes a rest on a road, probably during the beginning of Operation Barbarossa in the summer of 1941. The nearest Panzer has a Notek black-out driving head-lamp on the port side fender, and also has a widely-seen addition of a stowage locker a bit further back on the same side. It is a later model as can be seen by the straight front superstructure plate; the lack of a hull 7.92mm MG37(t) and the plated-over aperture indicates that this is a Panzerbefehlswagen (command tank).

By all indications, this is an earlier Jagdpanzer 38 as can be seen by the amount of rivets around the rim of the road-wheel hub as well as by the style of idler wheel. It also appears that the Schürzen have the straight front corners; later plates had the corner bent inwards to prevent it from being snagged and torn off. The German troops seem bent upon nothing more than surviving and getting home in this photograph taken in Náchod, Czechoslovakia during the final days of the war.

This photograph, taken at the same time as the previous one, also shows Germans retreating through Náchod, Czechoslovakia, at war's end. This well-camouflaged late-production Jagdpanzer 38 is also covered in German troops, but two identifying features can still be seen: the sheet-metal cover over the driver's twin periscopes and the later light-weight cast Topfblende (pot-shaped gun mantle).

What may be a Bergepanzer 38 crowded with troops of the Russian Liberation Army, tows a wagon through the streets of Březnice, Czechoslovakia on 10 May 1945. It would appear that this vehicle may simply be a normal Jagdpanzer 38 without a roof plate or main armament, since the height of the glacis plate indicates that it is not "cut down" as was the case on an actual Bergepanzer 38.